THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER MENTORING MODULE ON THE PERSONALITY OF PEER MENTORS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to identify the effectiveness of Peer Mentoring Module (PMM) on peer mentors with good characteristics along with their academic performance. From the Big Five Personality Dimensions, those characteristics which include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness should support peer mentors in handling the underachievers on academic mentoring program. Therefore, Big Five Inventory (BFI) was given to twenty peer mentors from the Engineering and Information Technology Degree program in Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN). The overall findings support the hypothesis that PMM is effective on peer mentors personalities. The research outcome may help researchers to identify the personalities of peer mentors through academic mentoring program. In addition, with PMM training, it may upgrade the quality of helping skills in peer mentors towards the underachievers. Therefore, identifying the right personality of peer mentors will be one of the important aspects in implementing the guidance and counseling practices in academic mentoring.

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Keywords: Academic mentoring, Peer mentoring module, Peer mentors, Big 5 personality dimensions.

1. NTRODUCTION

Academic mentoring program is a part of guidance and counselling in order to enhance the development of education field. Individuals who were more experienced, knowledgeable, reliable and caring are defined as mentors (Glenn, 2011). In learning, mentors are among the lecturers or students. A student mentor is also known as a peer mentor.

Peer mentors assist students with low academic achievement in schools as well as in universities. The effective peer mentors are able to help the underachievers to overcome academic difficulties, to make plans and to handle problems faced by those students. Most higher education students require mentors, but through previous study, it is found that the university faculty spends most of their time with students of high academic achievement (Glenn, 2011). However, at the end of 1960 in the United States, college students or peer mentors and community activists had developed a support service such as academic mentoring program that helped other students to succeed academically and to serve their communities.

In a study conducted by Wan Noradila Wan Mohd Zain (2007) on peer mentors at schools and colleges in Sarawak, researchers suggested that student counselors need to know the characteristics of peer mentors' personalities because through this research, they can train the peer mentors with helping skills in order to achieve effective mentoring system. Thus, the Big Five Personality Dimensions was used as a benchmark to determine the appropriate peer mentors' personalities in mentoring programs or modules.

2. PEER MENTORING MODULE (PMM)

Peer Mentoring Module (PMM) was developed specifically to provide soft skills for peer mentors that involved in mentoring program with students of low academic achievement. The formation of this module is the result of the combination of Big Five Personality Dimensions, counseling skills in Roger's person-centered theory and the application of Kolb experiential learning theory as shown in Figure 1.

Figure-1. Combination Big Five Personality, Rogers Theory and Kolb's Model
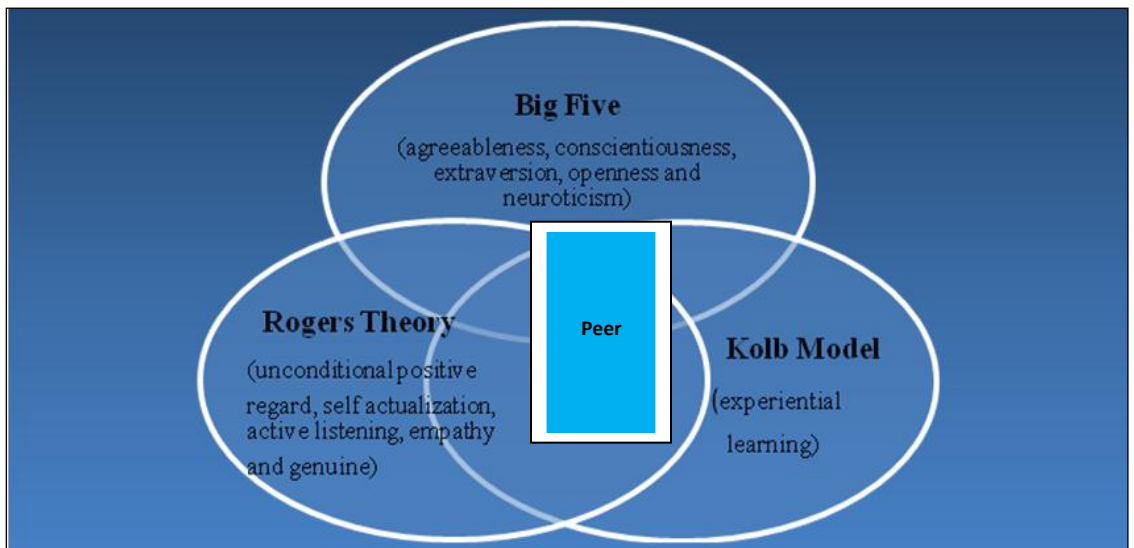
PMM was built systematically with activities (a 10-hours or 2-weeks training) as shown in Figure 2, for peer mentors to give opinions and constructive responses within group cohesiveness. As a result, the existence of mentoring relationship will be very strong among them and their protégé. Mentoring relationship among peers can be based on trust and empathy. In Model of Youth Mentoring by DuBois and Karcher (2005), it shows that this kind of special relationship on trust and empathy will lead to social-emotional, identity, and cognitive development.

Figure-2. Five Skills in Peer Mentoring Module
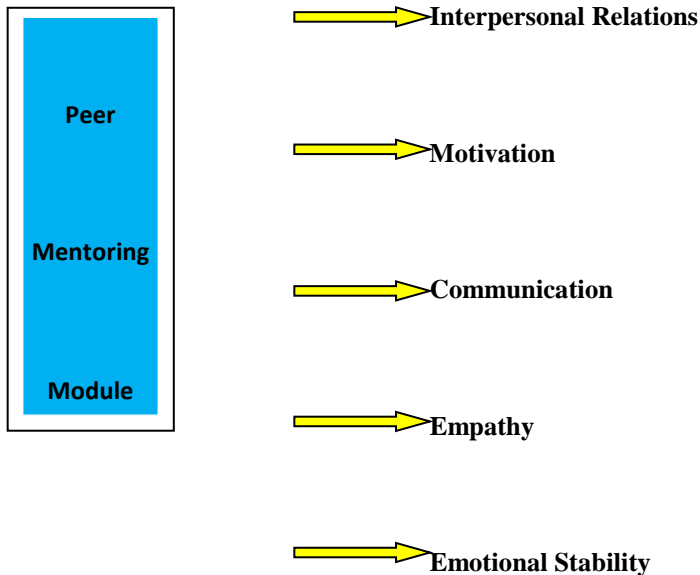
3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey research design to investigate the research problem. The main aim of using survey research was to obtain data to describe specific characteristic, attitude, or behaviours of a group (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1996). The Big Five Inventory (BFI) recognizes which of the aspects from the Big Five Personality Dimensions best represent the characteristics of peer mentors. Oliver and Sanjay (1999) stated that these dimensions did not represent a particular theoretical perspective, but were derived from analyses from the natural-language terms which people used to describe themselves and others. Table 1 below indicates the sub-dimensions for each characteristic mentioned in BFI.

Table-1. Big Five Personality Dimensions

Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
Sociable	Trust	Competence	Anxiety	Curious
Assertive	Straightforwardness	Organized	Irritable	Imaginative
Energetic	Warm	Dutifulness	Depression	Artistic
Adventurous	Compliance	Thorough	Shy	Actions
Enthusiastic	Modesty	Self-discipline	Moody	Feelings
Outgoing	Sympathetic	Deliberation	Vulnerability	Values

The BFI consists of 44 questions with a five-point Likert scale from `1' indicates Disagree strongly , `2' indicates Disagree a little, `3' indicates Neither agree nor disagree, `4' indicates Agree a little and `5' Agree strongly. Subjects are among 20 Bachelor Degree students of University Tenaga National (UNITEN) as shown in Table 2, with Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) 3.00 points and above (requirement to be selected as peer mentors). They are grouped and trained with Peer Mentoring Module (PMM) for 2 weeks / 10 hours.

Table-2. Group According to Gender, College and Year

Group	Gender (%)		College (%)		Year (%)			
PMM	Male	Female	COE	COIT	1	2	3	4
	70	30	70	30	3	8	5	4

A brief explanation was given to both groups of subjects on the description of the Big Five Personality Dimensions. With examples of statements on each dimension, subjects are considered to understand more in order to fill in the Big Five Inventory (BFI). The duration of answering the BFI was about 30 minutes to 1 hour long.

4. RESULTS

Analyses of the Big Five Inventory (BFI) are focused on the mean score and mean total score of each dimension for both subject groups. The total minimum and maximum score for each dimension is:

i.   Extraversion (total min. score, 8 items x 1 = 8; total max. score, 8 items x 5 = 40)

ii.   Agreeableness (total min. score, 9 items x 1 = 9; total max. score, 9 items x 5 = 45)

iii.   Conscientiousness (total min. score, 9 items x 1 = 9; total max. score, 9 items x 5 = 45)

iv.   Neuroticism (total min. score,8 items x 1 = 8; total max. score, 8 items x 5 = 40)

v.   Openness (total min. score, 10 items x 1 = 10; total max. score, 10 items x 5 = 50)

Please refer to Table 3 and Figure 3a & 3b.

Table-3. Big Five Personality for Group with PMM Mean Score & Total Score

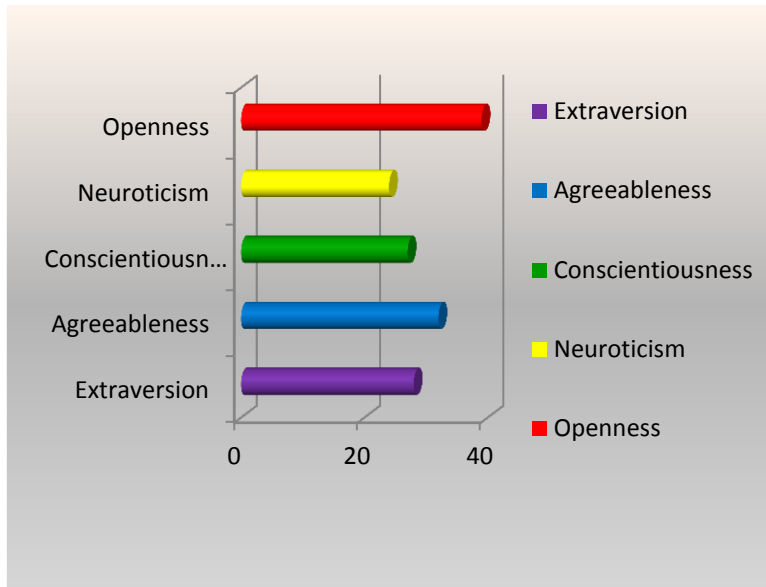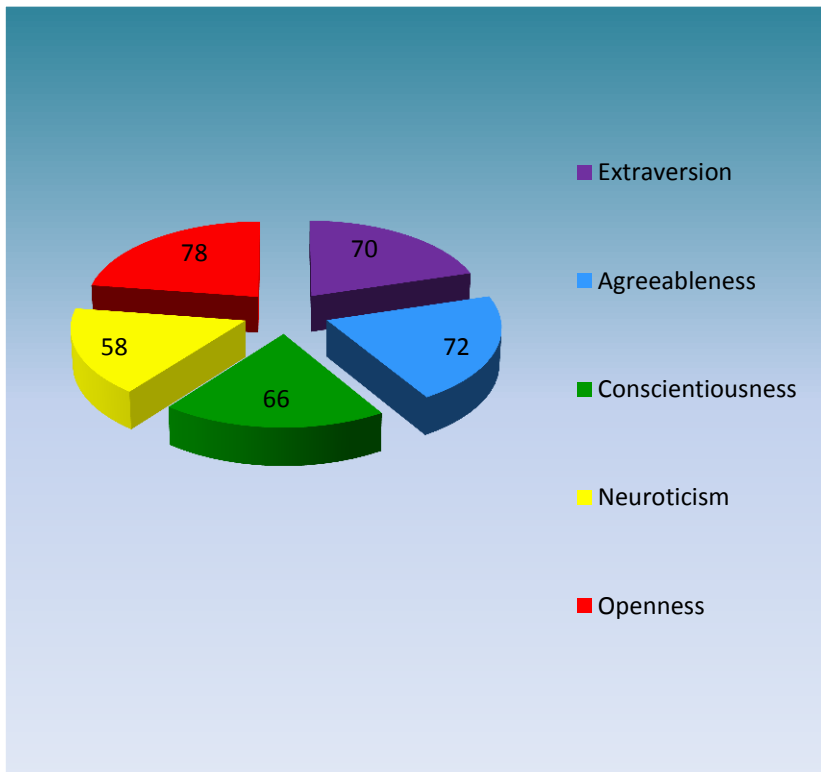| Big Five Personality	Mean Score	Total Score
Extraversion	28	70
Agreeableness	32	72
Conscientiousness	27	66
Neuroticism	24	58
Openness	39	78

Figure-3a. Big Five – Mean Score

Figure-3b. Big Five – Total Score

The findings for this research showed that openness has the highest total score with 39 points, followed by agreeableness with 32 points, extraversion in third place with 28 points, conscientiousness in fourth place with 27 points and lastly neuroticism with 24 points. Before PMM is developed, a research has been done by Haizan and Fauziah (2009), to identify the

personality of peer mentors. The mean score of both groups is shown in Table 4, while Figure 4 shows the comparisons graphically between 2 groups with PMM and without PMM. It clearly shows that with PMM the personality of peer mentors is focused on Openness and Agreeableness characteristics which lead to relationship, trust, empathy, feelings, value, understanding, cooperative, forgiving, warm and generosity.

Table-4. Big Five Personality: Comparisons of Group A and Group B

Big Five Personality	Group A (without PMM)	Group B (with PMM)
Extraversion	28	28
Agreeableness	35	32
Conscientiousness	33	27
Neuroticism	20	24
Openness	33	39

Figure-4. Big Five Personality: Comparisons of Group A and Group B
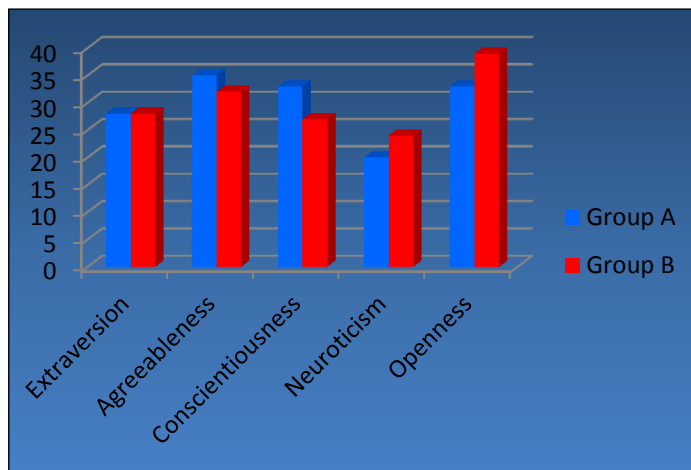
5. CONCLUSION

The essential characteristics of a successful peer mentor as stated by Berkeley (1994), is like a supporter who is willing to listen, is warm and caring, and always make himself/herself available in times of need; he or she also gives guidance on students' problems and encourages the learners to learn from experience, reflects the skills provided in Peer Mentoring Module. A peer mentor with the right personality will make a good academic mentoring by bringing the underachievers success.

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